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I CHOOSE

GERTRUDE CAPEN WHITNEY



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I CHOOSE

"Let the specimen suffice to those who have ears.
For it is not required to unfold the mystery but
only to indicate what is sufficient."

St. Clement of Alexandria

"Self knowledge, self reverence, self control.
These three alone, lead life to sovereign power."

Alfred, Lord Tennyson

I CHOOSE

BY

GERTRUDE CAPEN WHITNEY

AUTHOR OF

"YET SPEAKETH HE"

"ROSES FROM MY GARDEN"

"ABOVE THE SHAME OF CIRCUMSTANCE"

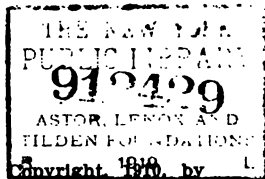
"THE HOUSE OF LANDELL"



BOSTON

THE FOUR SEAS COMPANY

1919



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THIRD EDITION

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TO
MY HUSBAND
GEORGE ERASTUS WHITNEY

10v. 29/19.

CHAPTER I

MARY ELLEN climbed heavily up the stairs to the bare room which was the only place she had to call home, closed the door desperately, sat down on the one chair, that had no top to its back, and a very unsafe leg, and pulled off her shoes. They were coarse, heavy shoes, and the uppers were worn, causing the pressure of the leather to accentuate itself just across the bend of the big toe joint. A few hot tears dropped on to her nose, while both hands were employed, and tickled it, and that made her angry in addition to her exhaustion and desperation.

"Oh, I am so tired," she gasped; "my feet ache so I can scarcely walk!"

"Mary Ellen!" came the shrill call of a child. "Come get me my luncheon, Mary Ellen, Ma' Ellen!"

"Dash 'em!" she said vengefully, pretending not to hear. "Here it is four o'clock and that young one coming in to a one o'clock lunch. Get me my luncheon indeed!" She threw one of the shoes at the opposite wall so fiercely that it made

another dent in the already much disfigured plaster of the room.

"Ma' Ellen, Mary Ellen!"

"Marie Alano!" called a maturer and sweeter voice, with a downward inflection. "Marie Alano?" came the voice still nearer, with the rising inflection sweet and clear, followed by a little tap. An opening of the door disclosed each woman to the other's view:—one a sullen, discouraged, heart-hopeless specimen of humanity in a room bare of the comforts of life, the other a girl of about eighteen in the full glow of health and contentment.

"Marie Alano," continued the latter pleasantly, "I told the children it was a shame to bring you down stairs again so soon. When I have to do a thing I'm tired of doing, I sometimes play I am someone else, and call myself by another name. Doesn't it make it easier for you to get that thoughtless boy's lunch because I call you Marie Alano?" she concluded with a mischievous laugh.

"I don't think it does," replied Mary Ellen sullenly. "It isn't as if it was once in a while, but it's always and always."

"He has brought back such a fine string of fish, Marie Alano. Don't you like fish?"

"Very much," responded Mary Ellen dully, "but every time he brings them in, your mother has just enough cooked for the family and sends the rest out to the neighbors. She never fails to consider her next door friend with horses and automobiles a nearer and hungrier neighbor than I," she continued, the despair of her tone taking the edge off her insolence. "She reads her Bible: 'Who doeth to the biggest, and not to the least, of these.' "

"Is Ma' Ellen coming?" again screamed the lad. "Ma' Ellen, do hurry! I just want a snack and then I'm off to take some of my fish to Molly Gringa."

"What did I tell you?" said Mary Ellen somberly, but with a shadow of humor flitting over her face, to be replaced at once by a heavy scowl. "Hit the nail, didn't I?"

She put on her broken shoes and followed Aldine Thurston down stairs. The half hour she had hoped to gain for rest was occupied in getting Guy's lunch; then came preparations for dinner. During that time she was called repeatedly to the door to admit callers and then to serve tea. Between rings she was reprimanded for not having on a spotless apron and for the untidy appearance of her hair. Her sullen retort that

she hadn't been able to comb it since six o'clock that morning because when she went up stairs to do it Guy had called her back, elicited only the response that she was stepping very carelessly and must see that her shoes were in better condition in the future. She could scarcely control her tears, and was almost on the verge of breaking down in the tea-room when her attention was arrested by something one of the callers was saying.

"It's lots of fun," she was laughing. "She says the whole change in her life came on the wings of somebody's calling her by another name than her own. Now she is wondering if that really had anything to do with the metamorphose. She is always tracing results to causes, you know, and says things have been moving towards her and reaching her, too, ever since."

"If we believe that all electrons have chemical affinity, it seems as if, as choosing souls, we might elect our lots in life," said a grave, sweet-looking woman. "I think that is what the doctrine of election means,—not that we are of the elected, chosen by a domineering God, but that we elect our part of God's gifts or elect to pass them by. We have the power of choice. Of *course*, if we are of one substance with God we

possess his attributes. Whether we use them or not is another matter."

"Some people choose very strange gifts," responded one of the guests. "Do you believe we make our own environment?"

"Yes; but I also think that surroundings and environment do not signify the same thing."

"I've never thought anything about it," interluded Aldine; "but I don't suppose they do. What difference do you find in their meaning?"

"I think a man may be surrounded by physical manifestations, as a ditch or a railroad gulch, but environed by such a perfect comprehension of the relative values of the things in life that his mind makes for him a heaven, as in the case of little Sara Crewe."

"Mary Ellen, do you hear the bell? It has rung twice," said Mrs. Thurston in an aside to Mary Ellen, who had been standing motionless beside the tea table during this conversation.

"Mary Ellen was listening as if she were Neptune, my poodle, and our words were juicy bones for her to catch," laughed Harriet Blount; but Felicia looked dreamy and smiled.

"I don't know why she hung round like that after she had brought in tea. She never did it before. She is usually so glad to get away that

she doesn't stop to wait on us half decently," sighed Mrs. Thurston. "Felicia, how do you always have such perfect service! I declare the servant question is getting worse and worse."

The callers, who were all intimate friends of Aldine's, trooped merrily out together.

Mary Ellen stood at the entrance. Only one of the group, Felicia, gave the servant a glance or kindly nod as they swarmed by her like bees, though she had opened the door to them several times a month for years. Mary Ellen did not expect recognition, and did not look at any of the outgoers till Felicia's fine lace scarf caught the key of the door.

Stooping to disentangle it, she looked into Felicia's eyes, then said softly, "Miss Felicia, who is Sara Crewe?"

"Felicia, I hope you did not tear that exquisite lace," said Mrs. Thurston, who, with Aldine, had accompanied the party to the door to watch the sunset. "It is as fine as the gossamers one sees lying over the grass on a summer's morning. I know your Uncle Beverly brought it to you from Spain." She stepped between Felicia and the maid, and the latter's question remained unanswered.

"Mary Ellen, I am surprised," Mrs. Thurston

said severely, after the door was closed upon the callers, "truly surprised. To think of your presuming to speak to my guests! It must not occur again,"

Mary Ellen said nothing, but went to the dining room to prepare the table for dinner. A happy gleam was in her eyes.

"No matter," she said to herself, "Miss Aldine called me by a new name, and I'll find Sara Crewe yet, and get her to tell me what they mean."

CHAPTER II

IT was very true that none of the fine catch of fish was left for the kitchen unless they chose to eat the fins and leavings, as the cook said sarcastically; but Mary Ellen, though she usually cared very much, seemed not to notice this time, for within her she was saying, "Perhaps there's a way out. They said we have attributes like God. Attributes—environment—surroundings—relative values—Sara Crewe. I must put those words down when I get up stairs, and dig into the meanings these people found in them; attributes—environment—surroundings—relative values—Sara Crewe." She hummed the words over to herself while doing the dishes lest she forget them before she found time to transfer them from her brain to paper, "We possess the power of choice! H'm! I don't believe it. Think I'd be dragging along this way without a minute to call my own? Choice! I guess not! Well, I *don't* have to wash dishes in this shut-up pantry, hot as blazes and smelling of dinner enough to make me sick! *I can open a window.*" She opened to its full

length the window in front of her and a refreshing salt breeze blew briskly in from the sea. "How good the salt air smells. Maybe that move is something towards changing surroundings. It's better, anyhow, and the thing that made me think of doing it may be the first step toward change of environment. One change is inside and one is out. Ha! ha!"

"What are you laughing about, Mary Ellen? I haven't heard you laugh for the longest," said cook.

"I'm laughing because I didn't think I was smart, and now I begin to believe I am."

"Whatever's led you to that notion?" said cook, wonderingly.

"No doubt it surprises you, but it surprises me less than that I've never realized it before. Surroundings: the outside thing about me. Environment: the feeling I live, inside! Now I want to find Sara Crewe, and find her I will. They say there's never one dish broken without three, By the same token I don't see why I may not hear her name twice more. How much better I feel since I let in that fresh air. I'd like to take a run out, now my work is done, but Mrs. Thurston is so particular about our going on set days."

She toiled upstairs and lighted her oil lamp. There was no electricity on the upper floor, and though the rooms were palatial below, those which formed the servants' dormitory were as ugly as the most ardent aspirant for outside effects instead of inside comforts could have designed.

"Phew!" she said as she entered her stuffy bedroom with windows almost hermetically sealed, "how it smells! I can't blame the Thurs-tons for that,—and I sleep in it every night! They haven't given me much to boast of by way of furnishings, but I do have two windows, and I almost never use them."

She whipped up the sashes to their full length and inhaled with joy the fresh tang of the June air, looking out with a new interest upon the distant sparkle of the moonlight upon the sea, then turning her eyes downward to the garden below where a group of young people were dancing to the strains of two uncertain violins and sundry other instruments.

"There's a street band playing a waltz. I believe I'll pretend some man has invited me to a party."

She took several turns, but stopped, quickly *exhausted* by the unusual exercise, and inter-

rupted by tripping over a ragged bit of carpet at the foot of her bed.

"Do you suppose I *chose* that? Well, I've let it stay here accumulating dust, besides running the risk of a broken leg. If I did not *choose* to have it put here, I need not *choose* to have it stay." She vigorously rolled up the pieces, of which there were several, and, with a shame new to her, found in the dust outlining the edges of each rug, unfailing proof that they had not been moved for some time in the rather rare periods of sweeping.

"She doesn't give me time to clean up," she excused herself. "I never get a good chance at it. It looks bare now without those rags, and much easier to sweep. Phew, what a dust! I suppose I breathe that every night. I truly have *chosen* dust instead of fresh air, I do believe. Believe? I *know* I have! And my evening, instead of being lonely and heart-achy, is becoming very interesting. Mrs. Thurston didn't like these old shoes. I will put on my Sunday ones to-morrow, throw these into the trash, and trust to the Lord for the next pair. Phew, how old they smell! It seems as if everything smells different. The sweet smells are sweeter, and the old ones are older than I ever noticed them to be.

I have lots of old shoes in the closet. I've always felt abused that I couldn't have pretty things about me,—but if I can't have what I'd like, I need not *choose* such a mess of old stuff as this. I wouldn't believe that discouragement and disheartenment could have made me so different from what I was with father—mother," she swallowed a sob. "I have grown careless and slovenly in every way—dress, speech, ideas! Oh! oh! I will have a rummage sale of lots of my ideas and expressions along with some of my clothes."

She went to the closet and hastily drew forth its contents, sorting deftly and enthusiastically.

"These old aprons can never be used, even to patch with, and this dress is too bad to wear down stairs, but the top will make a frock for Louisa's Minzie."

Twelve o'clock found Mary Ellen viewing two large piles, one of debris and one of odds and ends presumably useable for "Louisa's Minzie." There was pitifully little left in the drawers and on the nails of the small closet, but somehow when Mary Ellen had finished her task she did not mind. She was glad to be freed from so many encumbrances.

"*Phew!*" she said again, (it seemed now to

have become her favorite expression) "a dirty room begets a dirty owner. I would be ashamed to tell how long it is since I took a good, honest scrub after my old time fashion. Little excuse, for we do have hot water a plenty, and a bath room of our own on this floor, I suppose I've *chosen* dirt and smell, and lots of it, and have not *chosen* to remove what I could. While I am about it, I will give my hair a shampoo; it used to be real pretty, but lately it has grown wiry from lack of care."

The clean body called for a fresh gown, which was not always forthcoming, for Mary Ellen had to do her own washing in addition to the duties imposed by her position, and therefore had become chary of changing too often.

"I have *chosen* quite a number of things that do not make me proud of my taste," she said, as with a freshly beaten bed and pillows, clean sheets and body, and partly open windows she crept into bed at two o'clock. "I will not forget to find out more about the words 'attributes,' 'surroundings,' 'environment' and 'relative values,' and I will find Sara Crewe. I wish this bed smelt fresher; it must be very old. Perhaps, if I *choose*, I can get a better one some day. Maybe Sara Crewe can tell me how."

CHAPTER III

WHITTIKINS! D'ye see how prinky Mary Ellen looks?" said Guy Thurston at breakfast. "She must be having a beau! She isn't going to be married, is she ma? I saw her carting a lot of stuff from her room this morning as I came in from my swim."

"I hope not," said Mrs. Thurston, "and I sincerely hope she is not developing thieving traits."

As soon as breakfast was over and Mary Ellen engaged with the dishes, Mrs. Thurston, after the manner of many mistresses, made a thorough examination of her maid's belongings. No nook or cranny was sacred. Even the poor little trunk disclosed its scanty contents.

"It is deliciously clean," she said delightedly, after a strict survey. "I always dread to go into the servants' rooms, they do have that perfectly dreadful odor; but here both windows are open. She even has a little can of chlorides under the bed; and look, Aldine," to her daughter who had accompanied her, "her mattress and pillows are actually sunning."

"What vile pillows," said Aldine, in a tone half

sad, wholly shocked, "And mother, has this mattresses *ever* been done over?"

"Come to think of it, no. It was part of my wedding outfit, too."

"Twenty years! Horrible, mother, and cotton at that! You make any girl who sleeps on such a thing a germ carrier. Is there nothing down stairs you can exchange for this and surprise the old soul when she comes up to bed?"

"To tell the truth, I don't think any of the beds have been made over since I married."

"Horrors! Not the one Uncle Thad died on—and of consumption—and it's the one I sleep on too."

"I never thought."

"No, people were not taught as we are in college today about such things, but I won't sleep on it another night,—not another night!"

"I'll send it to the mattress maker's—"

"No, you won't, mother, dear, you'll send it to the bonfire, and we'll have the holocaust on the beach and invite the neighbors. Beds should be made over every three years for hygiene's sake, and every five for decency's, and excuse me from ever having beds inventoried as assets of any estates to which I may fall heir. I will telephone Basset to send us new sets throughout, pillows

and beds for the whole establishment. Then I shall issue invitations for such a big bonfire that people will think the commission has transferred the ship burning off the island to Quinibek. But, mother, see how bare everything is. We might spare a little from down stairs."

"We might spare a good deal," said Mrs. Thurston, rather shamefacedly; "but as Mary Ellen has clearly demonstrated her choice of cleanly bareness rather than dirty trash, I hesitate to send it up here. Much of it might better join your holocaust,"

Aldine and her mother went down stairs, the former to telephone first for the mattresses and, second, for some thirty young people to attend a bonfire on Quinibek Beach, at eight that evening.

"But, Aldine," expostulated Mrs. Thurston, "supposing the beds don't come?"

"Then I'll sleep on the floor as far as I am concerned. Ugh! I am horrified at this revelation of the ways of housekeeping of past generations," returned Aldine vigorously.

As Mrs. Thurston entered her own sumptuously appointed bedroom, she felt oppressed. But two of the six windows were open. She *followed her impulse* to throw wide the other

four. When Aldine entered, the breeze was blowing merrily from the sea on one side and from the hills on the other over a mass of heterogeneous articles Mrs. Thurston was throwing into the middle of the floor.

"Aldine, suppose you run up and hang this brown linen dress in Mary Ellen's room. It is perfectly fresh and quite too tight for me. I think it will fit her to perfection, for she was fitted to my dresses last fall, you know, when I was so desperately sick and had to have the dresses to be operated in,—oh, well, you know what I mean,—to get there in, then, if that pleases you better; and here is that striped mohair, and a whole stack of white shirtwaists."

"She will never be able to wear them. She never goes out, does she, and you keep her everlastingly in black in the house,"

"I'll tell her to go out more often, to celebrate their use," said Mrs. Thurston magnanimously.

"And can't we spare some of these rucks of magazines and these little books one is deluged with for gifts and one always means to read, they contain so much that is lovely, and never gets to! And, mother, mayn't I bring away that disreputable, armless, legless, backless chair, and take

up this little wicker one with the yellow chrysanthemum cushion?"

Downstairs, Mary Ellen, unusually happy, was humming to herself, as she polished the silver, "Attributes, surroundings, environment, relative values: how can I find out what they mean? I *will* find Sara Crewe!"

CHAPTER IV

THE mattresses arrived about four o'clock that afternoon. Though it was not possible, without too much inconvenience, to prevent Mary Ellen from seeing the influx, it was easy to make the change in her room without her knowledge. Guy, upon being initiated into the plan, desired to add his tribute; but as he was not yet sufficiently versed in the secret of giving to be willing to part with anything he wanted, he contributed nothing but an old arithmetic, a grammar and rhetoric, he had discarded, a school dictionary he disliked, and two small rugs which he hated because he stumbled over them whenever he went into the room in a hurry, no matter how many times he had determined to lift his feet over them. It was a miscellaneous pile of literature that was collected for Mary Ellen's pleasure, some twenty volumes in all. Most of them, except Guy's, were little holiday gift books. Aldine felt that these necessitated a pretty table cover as a background. So when Mary Ellen went upstairs that afternoon to refresh herself for tea and dinner service, a strange,

choking sensation overwhelmed her as she looked about.

"What a little makes a big difference in one's surroundings," she mused as she looked about her pleased and moved. "Surroundings! That's it—it's what you have about you. But what is it that often makes the same place feel different and be different? After all, one can choose some of it. I believe nights, after I get up here, I'll think what I'd *choose*, could I have what I want. It seems more decent and *alive* than to be thinking I wish't I was dead and how I hate those I'm working for. I wouldn't hate my work if I could feel I gave satisfaction. Oh, here's a dictionary. I haven't seen one since I left home, I had a beautiful home in the old days, not sumptuous but full of *brain* and of *love*," she continued reminiscently, fondling her new library with a strong awakening affection for what it was to bring into her life. "I wonder what became of father's books. I will try to get some of them when I go back. I could have had them before, but I didn't *choose*," she laughed. "I need not have been wondering what all those words mean if I hadn't *chosen*, for I really have known all the time. Isn't it interesting? To choose: 'to *select*,' *etc.* I would rather *choose* to *be* some-

thing myself than to *have* something. It seems as if, should I choose to be helpful and trustworthy and quick-witted and kind, the *things* will come easy enough. Why, that is choosing attributes." Rapidly assorting the books and arranging them upon her table she took up the dictionary eagerly and turned to that word. "Attributes means qualities. Somehow I feel as if I had been praying. Doesn't the Bible say, 'Choose ye this day whom ye will serve,' and choose—what else? I declare, I have no Bible. I will buy one to-morrow.

"I don't like the looks of these dirty walls," she added, giving a last look around before putting out the light; "I *choose* to have them clean if they are to be part of my surroundings. I wish I understood the meaning of environment. I can't get much from the dictionary. No matter. I *choose* to understand, and understand I shall!"

CHAPTER V

MRS. THURSTON," said Mary Ellen next morning, "there is a plasterer over at that new house. Do you mind if I ask him to come and patch the walls of my room? They are pretty good places for germs, and they are not sightly, to say the least. I don't believe he will charge me anything, for I fixed him up comfortably when he had a bad burn from lime one day, and he said he would always stand ready to return the kindness as best he could."

"A good idea, Mary Ellen. Do as you choose. Wouldn't you like a pretty paper? You can go down town this afternoon and choose it yourself."

Mary Ellen was even more delighted by Mrs. Thurston's use of the word choose than at the thought of the paper. She had very good taste and selected a dainty covering of white ground on which there were grouped bunches of forget-me-nots and bachelor's buttons.

"Blue eyes and blue flowers always seem so *seeing*," she said to the shop-keeper. "I could

never lie to blue eyes, they always seem to want, and to demand, truth."

"I wouldn't want to lie to brown ones, either," said the shop-keeper, observing the color of Mary Ellen's. "I have some pretty silkline for curtains," he continued insinuatingly, and Mary Ellen, for less than a dollar of her own money, found herself with dainty draperies to curtain the naked windows.

"Now I *choose* to show my gratitude to Mrs. Thurston, for she has been kinder than ever before, and I am going to surprise her," she continued to herself, pleased to ring the words choose and choice constantly in her own ears. Gaining some pertinent advice regarding preparing the walls and papering from her friend the plasterer, who had been also a paper-hanger, and some assistance from him as to sizing and cutting, she astonished Mrs. Thurston, before that person had even begun to think of sending for a workman, by announcing the triumphant completion of the room.

"You need not have done it yourself, Mary Ellen," said Mrs. Thurston, mystified. "Did you think I was not willing to do it for you? I was, perfectly so."

"No, Mrs. Thurston, but I choose to help

better my surroundings," she replied, unconscious of any strangeness in her remark, and unmindful of Mrs. Thurston's look of astonishment.

"Why, you will be like little Sara Crewe."

"Who was she, Mrs. Thurston?" said Mary Ellen; but just then Aldine burst into the room,

"Mother, they want me for one of the principal characters in the pageant, and I shall have to begin lessons at once. What shall I do for a chaperone?"

"Heaven knows!" sighed Mrs. Thurston. It was her way to call upon heaven as if it were a sort of deaf Buddha that on no account could be prevailed upon to hear anything she said. Her supplication was always accompanied with an exhausted expiration of the breath. When she respired it was so little that Mary Ellen, who naturally breathed with the full capacity of her lungs wondered sometimes how she managed to keep alive on the quantity she inhaled. She always spoke after the exhaust, consequently her voice, instead of being full of power, rasped the listener and herself, unwitting that the expression of every word caused complete readjustment of each cell in her body.

"I should think these society women would *chatter themselves* to death," Mary Ellen had

often thought. She waited opportunity to repeat her query about Sara Crewe, after Aldine's question should have been answered.

"Heavens!" again sighed Mrs. Thurston. "I can't chaperone every move you make. I didn't lug my mother about every time I went out."

"I don't choose it," said Aldine; "but, mother, all the others do, and you just must chaperone me."

"I just won't, then, I simply can not go up to town these hot days. If you can't behave without me, you won't with me; of that I'm very sure."

"It isn't the behaving, mother. Of course I would do that. It is the protecting, for we have to go up to town for the lessons, and the men are so bold in the big cities, they don't stop at just a wink and a hat lift now-a-days."

"There is no necessity for any woman who behaves herself to be spoken to," said Mrs. Thurston severely.,

"I used to think that, but the art of fascination is being reduced to a science. Too many of low moral fibre are studying its principles and demonstrating them down to the dark instead of up to the light for them not to be able to outwit us callow women sometimes. It's little enough study

based on principle that we do. Knowledge is haphazard with us, for good or bad. How many of our mothers ever sit down and teach us principles to protect us from these fascinators of evil intent?"

"We wouldn't dream of doing such a thing."

"No, so we girls are discovering to our cost. Now, about the chaperone?"

"How would Mary Ellen do?" said Mrs. Thurston, gradually recovering from the shock of Aldine's remarks. "What are you waiting for, Mary Ellen? But since you are here we will arrange it now. You can hurry and get your work done and then go with Miss Aldine to Mme. Pinchot's; and, remember, you must never smile or act as if you were one of the party, *under any provocation*. If any one dares look at Miss Aldine report him at once to the police."

"And have us dragged into court! Oh, mother, where is your diplomacy? Mary Ellen and I must adopt more skilful methods than that; and mayn't she *ever* smile, mother, not even with me alone?"

"If you wish your maid to be correct you must have an automaton."

"With the wisdom of a Solon in reserve! *Mary Ellen*, if mother is so obdurate about your

smile and I find we are so jolly you just can't repress one, I will send you to the dressing room for my handkerchief to let you relieve the congestion."

"I'll learn to smile inside, Miss Aldine," said Mary Ellen, "and I'll take the place as best I can, Mrs. Thurston."

"Heaven knows how I shall get along without you half of nearly every day; but be sure you do *everything* before you go, because I can not have the house upset."

"As for smiling inside, it seems to me as if you had been doing that pretty much all the time lately," said Guy, who had just come in from fishing, "and Mary Ellen, I left some fish down in the kitchen for you and cook. Somehow, mother always thinks of someone to send them to before you get any, so this time I left yours downstairs before I reported." He smiled at Aldine behind the maid's back, for Aldine had confided in Guy and had suggested the plan of action.

"Then, Marie Alano," laughed Aldine, "you must become my ogress by ten to-morrow morning."

"Remember, Mary Ellen," reiterated Mrs. Thurston, "be sure to have *everything* done before you start."

CHAPTER VI

MME. PINCHOT was one of the most beautiful women Mary Ellen had ever set eyes upon, a beauty that, more than physical, possessed all the superb qualities of a perfect physique; a mentality that scintillated; an emotive life which made itself felt at all times in luminous waves about her; and a spiritual power that held in superb poise all the phases that manifest consciously and intelligently in symmetrically unfolding man.

She entered upon the work of the pageant with the thought that in reviving history in this manner there are brought before both beholder and participant the duty of civic patriotism and the beauty of co-operation; and she demanded an earnestness from her pupils which brooked no levity.

"What is worth doing at all, young ladies, is worth doing well," she asserted. "I do not consider it sufficient that you are giving your services. I want you also to pledge your best endeavors, and the whole of your minds' activities."

Every day for weeks Mary Ellen took her

place at a stated time, on a straight, hard chair, in the hall where the lessons were given. For one long hour did she sit, the automaton Mrs. Thurston so desired.

"What's worth doing at all is worth doing well," she repeated, applying Mme. Pinchot's remarks to herself. If I can't follow her other instructions, I can follow that *if I choose*. I can imagine I am doing the exercises myself while I am sitting here." She listened intently to the instruction given by the beautiful woman, learning the history of the times the pageant represented, and graphically explained by Mme. Pinchot; and when the girls were executing the preliminary exercises tending to give them grace and rhythm, she did not watch them and their imperfections, but closed her eyes and in her vision beheld herself as in a luminous atmosphere sway to and fro, or otherwise attain the rhythm Mme. Pinchot so idealized and longed to actualize in her pupils. While doing this it seemed as if sight, hearing and all her other senses amplified and expanded in a sea of feeling reaching out and connecting her with things far beyond her understanding; and when the hour of her silence was over, she felt as if she had been in some far-off fairer world, which was more really her own

than the one she lived in could ever be.

The trips on the boat extended through the summer and far into the fall, for the family frequently remained out of the city until after Christmas. The clear, fresh air had given Mary Ellen color and charm; the care she was giving her hair and skin was making itself palpable in effect; the elevation of her thought betrayed itself at once in improved speech and enunciation; the modish, but strictly severe black mohair faintly lined with white, which Mrs. Thurston had given her, topped by a severe hat, made her look so wholly the equal of Aldine that often gentlemen, joining Miss Thurston on the boat, would wait expectantly to be introduced. The automatic expression which Mary Ellen always preserved was insufficient to protect Aldine from the irritation of having to explain that she was carrying about, not a society blockhead, but an eminently correct companion.

"Whittikins! Mary Ellen," said Guy one day, "I thought you were an old woman; but I don't believe you are any older than Aldine."

"Yes, a little, Master Guy," replied Mary Ellen. "I'm into my twenties."

"If you had Aldine's environment you'd knock *spots out of her.*"

"Environment? What is that, Master Guy?"

"Oh, look it up in the dictionary I gave you," said Guy, somewhat abashed. "Lord! Mary Ellen, you don't expect people to know how to explain every word they use, do you? It's what you are brought up in, I suppose."

"The ladies said it was different from surroundings."

"Well, you've got me! I can't help you out."

"Mme. Pinchot said in the class the other day that one could live in squalid surroundings and possess a beautiful environment, for environment is made out of things of the soul. One can know poets and great writers and thinkers in one's environment, while surrounded by apple vendors and chestnut stands. I can't understand it. Master Guy, who is Sara Crewe?"

"I don't know. Why?"

"I want to talk with her; and Master Guy I've gone through that arithmetic and grammar you gave me and thank you so much for them. Father and mother were great students and I was accustomed to having thought and books about me as long as I lived at home. Have you an algebra you would sell me? I had gone well into algebra and geometry when I left school, and liked them."

"I guess I can find you one," replied Guy. "Gosh, you must like to study, I should think you'd be sort of lonely. I call it darned mean to keep servants shut up nights all but once a week and every other Sunday. They even let horses exercise, and if the work's done, what's the odds?"

"They need me to answer bells and such things."

"I should think it would make you feel awfully measley. I'd die if I had to be cooped up and couldn't run. What do you do nights, anyhow?"

"For one thing, I have been practicing what Mme. Pinchot teaches. I watch her all lesson time and try to express the ideas in the evening."

"Be Joan of Arc listening to the voices. Whittikins! Mary Ellen, you scare me. You really hear them, don't you? What's got into you lately?"

"I just found out, sometime ago, Master Guy, that I wasn't choosing lots of sweet things in life that I could easily select, and that I had the choice of letting go many things that were not so agreeable; so day by day I pick and choose, pick and choose."

"Gosh!" was Guy's polite rejoinder. "Well,

it's doing you lots of good, Mary Ellen. You are getting to be a perfect stunner."

Mr. Thurston often went up to town with Aldine and Mary Ellen. He was a fine looking man, as the world would say,—of gross type, large proportions, and eyes whose air of open candor did not, to the initiated, conceal the furtiveness beneath.

One day, after reaching the hall where the lessons were held, Aldine was seized with a faintness; and after the stir incident to the attack was over, Mme. Pinchot faced a class ready to render intricate figures which it needed the full number of pupils to express. Everybody's time would be lost could no substitute be found. Sweeping her eyes over the hall as if to find answer to a wish, she encountered the gaze of Mary Ellen.

"Do you think you could take the vacant place? she said. "It will prevent the loss of time, and we have none to spare."

Aldine, who was resting easily on a couch, declared herself well enough to dispense with Mary Ellen's attendance, and soon, in a cheese-cloth robe, the maid took her place with the others. The first figure was Guido Reni's "Aurora." Aldine had been given the place of

the most prominent muse in the wonderful elusive dance created by Mme. Pinchot. Mary Ellen had watched and visioned the part many times; and a gasp of delight ran through the company at the wonderful impersonation, without correction, in the exquisite preliminary dance. At its close a burst of applause greeted her.

"Bravo! bravo! Mme. Pinchot, I have never seen anything so beautiful," said Mr. Thurston, who had entered the hall, having been telephoned for at the first signs of Aldine's indisposition. "Introduce me to that prodigy of yours, Mme. Pinchot."

Mme. Pinchot laughed. "That is wholly unnecessary, Mr. Thurston. She has often answered your door bell or handed you your tea, perhaps. She is your daughter's maid."

Mme. Pinchot drew back a little and a pallor overspread her face, which as quickly disappeared, as the immediate atmosphere of the man revealed to her a dull and murky red, and a sombre gleam leaped to his eyes. A sudden protruding of the lower part of his head and almost imperceptible lurching forward of the shoulders caused Mme. Pinchot to turn to Mary Ellen and send her at once to the dressing room to resume *her ordinary* apparel. She entered earnestly into

conversation with Mr. Thurston; but when Mary Ellen reappeared and left the hall with Aldine and her father, her beautiful eyes filled with sadness, followed them.

"No, I have not been able to make him forget," she said piteously to herself. "God help her! The lamb is in the ravening lion's claws!"

CHAPTER VII

MARY ELLEN had just laid aside her arithmetic and taken up her rhetoric that evening, when there came a tap at the door. The cook had gone out and no one ever came to her room but Guy, who usually prefaced his advent by calling from below; so with a feeling of portent she opened the door. The blood flooded to her face and left it deathly pale as she saw Mr. Thurston standing at the entrance with a plate of fruit in his hand.

"I've come to see how they treat this very valuable member of my household. We don't mean to be unkindly, but there is so much to fill our minds. You know we always mean well by you, and if you need any little thing, don't hesitate to ask me. Here is some fruit. And what do you do up here by yourself every evening? Don't you get lonely?" He attempted to pass through the entrance, which instinctively she had kept filled by her position.

"I do well, Mr. Thurston, with books the family have kindly supplied me. Your wife—"

"Oh yes, doubtless she has been kind; but women of her age don't realize that a young thing like you needs recreation. Lord! To think of a girl of your fibre spending her life in quarters such as these."

"I have the power of choice, sir, to better my surroundings as soon as I can separate them sufficiently from myself not to carry them with me wherever I go. I must make *myself* better than that about me before I can lift myself out of it. Change alone will not accomplish the purpose. It is character I need, not change."

"Gad! you live up in the garret in reality, don't you,—in the upper story, as the magazines say. Look out the roof doesn't leak."

"I intend to lift the roof off some day and live in the open altogether, sir, if I ever get to that stage."

"You're a fine girl, d'ye know it?" he said, pushing a little closer, and a dull flush mounting and suffusing his very eyes.

"I thank you for the compliment, Mr. Thurston," she replied, changing her voice in no whit. "I greatly esteem the qualities that make for nobility of men and women, and desire never to fall in your estimation. I thank you for the fruit and for your consideration. As the hall is lighted,

I need not hold the lamp to show you down. Good night, sir." She gently closed the door.

"Well done, by gad," said Mr. Thurston, with a lurid look at the barricading panels; "but time! time!"

Mary Ellen did not turn the key; there was none to turn; but long after the sound of the creeping footsteps had died away, she stood leaning heavily against the door, with the dead weight of her numbed body, electrified by her alert and awakened mind, against the futile barrier which never could protect her from a man's desire.

"God!" she whispered, fumbling weakly at the key-hole where she knew no protection lay, "God! I *choose!* I *choose!* But what if *he* choose too! God, is there no way to strengthen the power of *my* choice for purity, for integrity, for the attributes of Thyself as they become known to me, and make them so strong that they may encompass me?"

She moved from the door and stood in the centre of the room, unconsciously assuming the attitude of Joan of Arc listening to the voices, by which she had so startled Guy that afternoon. Then, stretching up her arms, she looked far out of the room in which she stood, into a white, *luminous light*, feeling, with her inner being, the

power of her life expand, and gaining calm therefrom.

“ ‘Yea, though I pass through the valley of the *shadow* of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me,’—only the shadow, not the death,—there is none where Thou art, and Thou art *within* me. Likewise, Thou dost environ me. Thou dost lead me where lie the building stones of my character and the work of my life. I choose integrity, I choose helpfulness, I choose to build of choice materials,—but oh! I am afraid!’ ”

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. THURSTON," said Mary Ellen the next morning, before starting with Aldine for Mme. Pinchot's, "I think I will ask you to supply my place as soon as possible, as I have decided on other plans for my livelihood."

"Going on the stage, I suppose!" sneered Mrs. Thurston. "That is always the way! After the exhibition of yesterday I suppose you think you can be a Bernhardt or a Dusé. A most preposterous proceeding, I call it. Mme. Pinchot ought to have known better. I am astounded that a woman of her experience should have permitted such a thing. Of course, now you are upset for all the ordinary uses of life. All actresses are bad, and if you want to remain a good girl you will stay under the protection of a home like this and not fly off your head at the first insincere praise from the outside world. Aldine told me of that ridiculous performance yesterday, and I am disgusted."

"That has nothing to do with my decision, Mrs. Thurston. I simply choose to make a change," said Mary Ellen.

"And when we've done all we have to make you comfortable,—giving you fresh, pretty paper for your room and all the other things."

"You have been kind, but I choose to go," repeated Mary Ellen.

"Of course you are free to do as you please and gratitude counts for nothing; but I hope you will stay till I can supply your place, for I expect guests for Christmas, and your going is very inconvenient. If Mme. Pinchot asks you to make a spectacle of yourself today, my advice to you would be to refuse. Hurry now or you will lose your boat."

Aldine looked grave as she started for the wharf in company with Mary Ellen. She had a broader view of life than her mother, besides being possessed of good health, which, in itself, is an aid to unbiased vision; and though in no sense a humanitarian, still the thought of the times towards brotherhood had touched her, and though ever so faintly had impressed itself upon her attention, if not upon her actions.

"Mary Ellen, are you unhappy with us?" she said shyly, as they walked towards the boat.

"Of course some things have been hard, Miss Aldine, but I could have made many of them happier had it occurred to me to do so; yet take

it altogether, I have been comfortable, if not wholly content."

"Do you feel that you are out-growing house-work, Mary Ellen? I have noted a great change in you this summer. There is much demand for mother helpers such as you are capable of becoming. It is pitiful that just as soon as a girl shows herself equal to such a position she steps out of the home, yet one can scarcely blame her. It seems extraordinary to me that the world gives recognition to laboratory workers of other sorts, and to all other chemists; but that rarely are the most important of them all, the cooks who are the chemists who deal with the laboratories of the human stomach, more than demeaned; even as are the maids who often are more truly the comfort makers than the so-called mistresses of the home. They have a noble calling, both of them. There seems to be a curse from kitchen to salon. We all seem to be trying to find ourselves by seeking new positions instead of glorifying old ones."

"I don't think that *stepping out* of surroundings is going to help us find ourselves. It is our understanding that gives us new surroundings, *not new surroundings* our understanding."

"Where do you get so much philosophy, Mary Ellen?"

"I heard your friends talking about choice the day you first called me Marie Alano, and then I began to think. I used to think a good deal when I was at home with father and mother, before I grew discouraged. Then, too, nearly every one of those little gift books you brought to my room has explained wonderful truths to me."

"The very things I cast aside have been stepping stones to you! How strange!"

"But there are so many points I do not understand yet. I wish I could find the lady you were talking about one day, who had learned how to live *true*, no matter by what she was surrounded. I think she would help me."

"Who is that?"

"Sara Crewe."

"Oh, that is the name of a little girl in a story written by Frances Hodgson Burnett. We have the book in the library at the city house. If you want to read it, I'll give you the key and you can get it after the lesson, while I am lunching with Sallie Prondfit. You can meet me at the wharf for the four o'clock boat. The book is in the children's corner of the library. I am sorry

you feel like leaving us, Mary Ellen. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," replied Mary Ellen, her lip quivering. I think I shall go home for a while."

"Have you a home?"

"A sort of one. It used to be rather a good one; but somehow we lost hold and it began to go to pieces. There was much more there to hold together, as I realize now, than I had any idea of. It all seemed nothing; but as I get a better comprehension of the relative values of things, I understand how much that was really beautiful I have had and let slip out of my life."

"Mary Ellen," said Mme. Pinchot, after referring in enthusiastic terms to her performance of the preceding day, "have you ever studied this work?"

"Only from you, Mme. Pinchot," replied Mary Ellen.

"Behold a second Sebastian learning painting from his master," tittered one of the girls. Mme. Pinchot, ignoring the interruption, said gravely, "How have you learned from me?"

"I listened to your directions, then shut my eyes and saw myself following to the minutest detail all you advised. I could see myself as *distinctly as I see clouds in the summer sky*. I was

always moving before a background of white light such as one sees at dawn or sometimes at late sunset. Then, when I went home, I tried to express outwardly what I had seen inwardly."

"I have taught hundreds of pupils," said Mme. Pinchot, "but you only, to my knowledge, have found the path of illumination to wisdom. If you follow the gleam in all the steps of life, yours will be a wonderful experience. To you has been revealed the secret of attaining. What would you like to do?" she asked, calling her aside.

"To find the quarry whence to hew the building blocks for my character," said Mary Ellen solemnly.

"Child, you know not what you ask! You can pick flowers by the roadside; but to quarry is to go into depths, to be grimed, perhaps wounded, maimed."

"I want the understanding that will lead me on to ever-expanding environment. 'A superior understanding forces a superior condition.' I read that weeks ago. I must have understanding,—not flowers, but wisdom,—life! Mme. Pinchot, I am leaving the Thurstons."

Mme. Pinchot looked at the girl keenly.

"Why, Mary Ellen?"

"Circumstances,—rather, my understanding

has been enlightened. I see I must step out."

"Have you any plans?"

Mme. Pinchot was well satisfied as to what those circumstances were, but respected the dignity of the girl's reticence.

"None at all, Mme. Pinchot."

"Will you take a place with me till you find something better?" I need someone to assist the pupils to dress and undress and attend to keeping the costumes in order."

"I have promised to remain with Mrs. Thurston till she supplies my place; and I do not think she intends to hurry, for she is going to have guests and I think she will try to keep me till they have gone. I want to be kind."

"Not too long, Mary Ellen!" admonished Mme. Pinchot. "Many a girl has lost the divine right of moral choice by yielding to the desire to be kind."

CHAPTER IX

MARY ELLEN turned the key of the door to the city house and entered its cool precinct, with a feeling as if she were entering the chamber of initiation that, ending her novitiate, would enter her upon mysterious ways.

There seemed no reason why the feeling should so possess her, for the house was rather commonplace as the houses of the well-to-do go. There was no especial personality in the family which made itself felt in the furnishings. It was even too well aired to be musty,—a quality that tends, supposedly, towards mystery. She went to the children's corner in the library, and there on the second shelf found the book she wanted, so small, so inconspicuous a volume to hold the mighty secret for which she sought! She glanced over it hurriedly, for she was a rapid reader, and soon had the epitome of the story, leaving its cherished details for a time of greater leisure.

"A beautiful idea," she said as she closed the book to go, for it was after three, and she needed time to reach the wharf by four, "a beautiful

idea; but I want to be my own Hindoo servant and Indian gentleman; I want to be conqueror of my own fate."

She was making the rounds of the house preparatory to leaving, when she heard the key in the front door, and Mr. Thurston came hastily into the hall.

"Mary Ellen," he said hurriedly, "Aldine told me you were here. Guy has had an accident and we have been sent for. Mrs. Thurston wants me to take you down to the train. She feels too shaken to be without attendance. I have a car at the door."

Mary Ellen hastened down the steps and entered the vehicle, shocked at the news that the little fellow, quite her favorite in the family, who, the day before, full of life and vigor, had left home to visit his friend in a neighboring city, should have been stricken down.

"Is it serious, Mr. Thurston?" she asked anxiously, when they were well on the way.

"I can tell you nothing. After we get on the train I will read you the letter and see if you can make out what it is all about. Devilish mischief these boys get into, anyway. I hope we shall not lose that train." He pulled out his *watch from time to time, after the manner of men.*

The train was about to move, when the two hastened up to the Pullman, boarding it just as the engine moved heavily out of the station. The porter led them through the car to the drawing room at the farther end. He threw open the door, asked for orders, bowed obsequiously at the liberal tip, and retired, leaving the two—alone.

"Where is Mrs. Thurston?" said Mary Ellen, a terrible horror overwhelming her.

"Don't worry about her. I told Aldine you had sent me word you were taken ill and you had gone to a friend's; they won't expect you back for several days," returned Mr. Thurston. "Sit down, Mary Ellen, I told you awhile ago you were too fine a girl never to have a bit of fun."

"But, Mr. Thurston—"

"Oh yes, I know. We will just take a run to Quebec and back again and no one will be the wiser."

"I shall be,—already am,—a great deal wiser," said Mary Ellen. "Mr. Thurston, will you not let me pass and go at least into the common coach until we reach the next station? Then I will leave the train. Mr. Thurston, how could you do this cruel thing? Think of Aldine! I am but little older than she. The world is so quick to cast a slur, and since Mrs. Thurston is

not here, I prefer more publicity in our method of traveling."

"Oh no, we can manage things without any publicity. You really wouldn't want that, you know. Sit down, Mary Ellen. I should think you would be so glad Guy is all right that you would submit to anything; you pretend to be so fond of him."

Mary Ellen stood perfectly still in the centre of the drawing room. She was trapped, and she knew it,—trapped like a rat in a cage, to be taught tricks and to serve as the plaything of a master. Here, shut in with a beast, and nothing between her and his passion. Nothing? These were her surroundings, but what of her environment! Could she environ herself sufficiently with the power of God to hold the beast at bay? She quietly seated herself. So great a change had come over her that Mr. Thurston, smug and sinister, smiling up at her from the corner of the couch, shivered and cowered.

"Come, come, Mary Ellen, don't play to the grandstand. Come sit by me and be comfy."

"I am comfortable where I am," she said, and fell upon silence.

It was a silence so profound, so different from

any he had ever encountered, that for the moment he respected it.

"This is only the *shadow* of death," Mary Ellen was saying, "only the shadow. A shadow passes. The reality is here, here, where Sara Crewe and God and I live. Already I see light!"

She closed her eyes and still remained motionless. The weeks of practicing control at Mme. Pinchot's were bearing fruit. She visioned hosts of protectors about her and her world was luminous to her.

"Mary Ellen, for God's sake move. Are you subject to fits? This is not what I came for,—fits!" said Mr. Thurston nervously.

Finally Mary Ellen opened her eyes, and Mr. Thurston arose and came over and sat beside her. He put his hand caressingly upon her cheek. The contact stung him.

"Gad!" he said. "What an electric battery you are."

"A dynamo of power," she replied. "Those books your wife and daughter gave me, Mr. Thurston, have been so beautiful to me. They were little gift books with pretty covers and I had nothing to do and the print was easy; but when I began to read them I felt as the blind must feel when they begin to read from raised

text. Their thought has impressed itself upon my soul till now that is no longer what it was before, but a new creation,—a recognized entity.”

“Pshaw! You couldn’t take that in in so short a time.”

“The change comes in years or weeks or in a day. When we are ready, our environment *super-vises* our surroundings; isn’t that a beautiful idea? ‘Superior understanding forces superior conditions.’ I am very happy in my faith, Mr. Thurston; it makes me feel so sure.”

“Do you believe all this occult stuff that is going the rounds?”

“I don’t even know what you mean by occult.”

“Why, it means hidden.”

“No, all that is hidden shall be made plain. As we are here for some time, let me tell you the tale of little Sara Crewe. It is the story your daughter has been good enough to let me read.”

He put forth his hand again to touch her, but was withheld as by some invisible barrier.

“You make me think of what Shakespeare says about, ‘He giveth angels a charge concerning thee,’ ” he said jocosely, “but he doesn’t say an eighty thousand voltage. That would kill a man. *Go on and tell* the story. You have a beautiful

voice and I can listen to it, whether I hear your tale or not."

He looked desiringly at her, but she began the little history with exquisite simplicity, a poise and purity in her tone that soothed him like a breeze and cooled the heated passion of his heart.

The sunset flamed over the meadows and forests, flooded the world with crimson and died away. The hour came for dining and Mr. Thurston ordered a luncheon, not daring to face the dining car. Of this Mary Ellen partook. The shadows gathered and night fell.

"The night has a thousand eyes, the day but one," said Mary Ellen to herself. "Then I am a thousand times more in the light than I was two hours ago."

The porter came and made preparations for the night, and still the train thundered on.

"Are you going to compel this situation?" said Mary Ellen, standing before the man when the porter left them.

"I am, you beauty, and it's no use quarreling with Fate. Fate is a very good friend when taken by the hand. You're compromised already, so no appeal will amount to anything. They wouldn't notice it anyway. The service would

find it easier to evade a little matter like this than face it. Come, kiss me, M^{ary} Ellen."

"No, it is better not," she said, putting up her hand and turning his face gently aside, though his silky moustache brushed her cheek as she moved from his lips, and withheld herself from the deadly chloroforming breath of a man in passion.

"I'm going to bed," he stated brusquely. "What are you going to do?"

"I shall rest upon the couch. Good night."

She closed her eyes and prayed, motionless as a sleeping child, her hand pillowing her head; but behind those closed lids her spirit kept commerce with God, whose angels had indeed been given charge concerning her. And the dynamic power of her being sent forth protection through the darkness.

Five times that night did this beast at bay leave his couch and stand beside the seemingly sleeping girl. Five times he put forth his hand to morally slay, and five times drew back,—a-fraid.

When day came, he went surlily to the dressing room, viciously threw his belongings into his grip, and, as the engine drew up in the station, swung quickly from the still moving train and *disappeared*.

CHAPTER X

MARY ELLEN went slowly forth from the drawing room, alighted from the car, and made her way to the waiting room. She refreshed herself as best she could; then, before making any attempt to plan for the future, partook of breakfast.

She had not sufficient money with which to return to the city whence she had been so ruthlessly dragged the day before; and she realized that a rested physical condition would add much to the ease of decision when time for that should come. The coffee was very good and very hot, and she had a piece of broiled ham and eggs done to a turn and a baked potato. Then she went out into the bright light of the morning.

She *let* the charm of the quaint old city take possession of her. Had she been there of her own choice and under most auspicious circumstances her mind could not have been more free. Only at intervals the Bible quotation so vulgarly brought to her attention floated as from an angel chorus to her inner sense: "He shall give His

angels charge concerning thee lest thou dash thy foot against a stone."

At length she found herself near the cathedral, and entered. It was practically empty. She needed rest, for she had not slept a moment the preceding night; and after kneeling she took a seat and closed her eyes.

Only the teachings of the past few months came before her mind, not driftingly, as in a dream, but actually, as in reality. The hours of isolation had been to her, instead of a desolation and a curse, a world of her own, in which ideas that, in many minds, with distracting and diversified interests, take long to grow, had been fostered unhindered by the criticisms or doubts of those about her. While all had seemed antagonistic to her growth, all really had been helpful to it. The very lack of friends,—the very imposed stillness,—surely all is well,—and lo, she was asleep.

When she awoke it was nearly noon. She returned to the station, again refreshed herself, and took her lunch. Then, going into the waiting room, she considered her dilemma. She had given her word to Mrs. Thurston to stay with her until a competent substitute was found, and *do it she would*, if possible. How could she hope

to build character without Truth, which is what "Principle compels!"

"Here is a block of choice material with which to build," she thought, recurring to her talk with Mme. Pinchot. "Now, how can I get back! That is beyond my *reason* to decide. I will seek light."

Of facing Mr. Thurston again she seemed to have no fear. She closed her eyes. Clouds of dull gray masses floated before her inner vision. The outer light from the great windows disturbed her by the glare, and removing her black ribbon belt she pinned it over her eyes and sat still.

"Light!" she called. Then her mind ceased its activity and she waited. Yea, even her constant attitude of intelligent service was fulfilling its purpose now, in ways of growth so natural to her that she did not know they were founded on the divine law of manifestation of the Principle of Being, which, being permanent, is constantly demonstrating.

A party of two gentlemen, a lady and three little children had entered the waiting room together with a woman evidently the nurse, who seemed desperately ill. Soon the ambulance attendants appeared and the woman was taken away, leaving the frail looking mother in charge

of three as restless specimens of humanity as are often put on to this planet for the alternate distraction and delectation of mankind.

"I do not see how I can get down to Boston by myself with the babies," the little mother sighed distractedly to her husband. "After I reach there my old nurse will willingly help me; but oh, that terrible fifteen hours. Leopold, I cannot do it!"

"Dear Heart, I wish I could go with you," replied the husband tenderly, "but you know how it is. I am glad Marie could be left here in good care. It would have been a terrible responsibility for you had she been taken ill on the way. Now you can rest content that she is well attended, even if you are discommoded by her absence."

"Don't you suppose that, among all these people, there is one person we could trust to take her place? We have no time to go out for any one. Carles," she said, turning to her brother, "look about in that wonderful way of yours and try to see some one you can approach. The train goes in half an hour. We can pay somebody's way down and back again and for the time besides. Surely, there is some one in all this crowd who can serve us. *See, Carles.*"

Mr. Orchester left the party, and instead of

looking over the motley assemblage of women of divers degrees of intelligence, he moved from them and stood apart. Then he turned again and looked upon them.

"Willoughby," he said, walking towards his brother-in-law, "do you see that young woman in the black mohair with the faint white stripe? Watch her a moment."

Mary Ellen was removing the ribbon from her eyes, and at the same moment the baby of the group lunged suddenly forward and ran gurgling towards her. She caught it up just in time to prevent its falling and striking its head upon the edge of the seat. With it still in her arms she went over to the group.

"I will take care of her till your train goes if you would like to have me," she said to the little mother. "I love children, and my time is free. Was the nurse very ill?"

"We could not tell. It was a sudden attack and it seemed imprudent for her to travel. I shall be so relieved if you will care for baby till the train leaves. She is a perfect little witch. I do not know how I shall get her to Boston all by myself. You don't happen to know anyone who would like to take the trip down there, do you?"

She can come back by return train, if she desires, and I will pay her well for her services."

"I shall be very glad to go with you if you will let me leave you at once upon our arrival. I have an obligation to meet outside the city, and shall not wish to return here."

"You are a godsend," sighed the relieved mother; "and see, the children like you."

"And so are you a godsend," said Mary Ellen.

CHAPTER XI

THE children gathered happily about Mary Ellen, while the mother sat back in her car seat and as happily watched them. Soon the baby went to sleep, and Mary Ellen opening her book began to read to the older ones the story of Sara Crewe.

Mrs. Willoughby drew near and listened as well as did the children; and when finally the two elder followed the example of their baby sister and succumbed to sleep, she began to talk.

"You look as if you had been somewhat of a Sara Crewe yourself," she said, watching Mary Ellen's face, in which was written, deeply graven, something that had not been there three days before. It was not engraved in wrinkles, nor in disfiguring lines; but as the artist builds his colors on the carefully applied prime which is never seen, but always *felt*, so, in the depths of the eyes, in the wonderful clarity of the skin, there was shown to the practised observer a transmutation of the gross into the finer fibre of life.

"Has your Hindoo servant appeared?"

"Yes, Mrs. Willoughby," replied Mary Ellen, with a sense of grim humor at the thought; "but he didn't play the role exactly like Sara Crewe's helper:—not so helpful to outward appearances,—but I know now that he has given me a long lift upward. I said yesterday I wanted to be my own Hindoo servant and Indian gentleman, but we can't be that, after all. We have to be helpers, one with another; and we get uplifts where least we expect to find them, if we keep following our gleam."

"You say you have been in service?"

"I have," replied Mary Ellen. "My father was a doctor and a learned man in everything but how to make this world count. I don't know but that that is as necessary a thing to learn as any other. It doesn't seem natural that we can expect to do much better, relatively, with the next condition than we have done with the present one, does it? But father died."

"Do you know anything of brotherhood work? If you ever care to look into it, go, or write, to my brother, Charles Orchester. He is a wonderful man, Mary Ellen. He belongs to a school of thinkers who not only believe in, but strive to *live* as Spirit manifesting through transitory *things*. He found you before the baby did. It

seems as if outward appearances have no power to keep from him the knowledge of the real. He believes that we are all parts of an infinite One; and if we keep the circulation, so to speak, free, all members of that Body can work consciously together, finding help in each other, and uplift. Even as the vine, sending its sap, (or the mind wisdom of nature), through the branches and grapes, works to its outermost unconscious periphery in harmony, so we, the branches and fruit, may receive, *consciously*, if we cultivate and use God given gifts of spiritual insight and of choice. I will give you Mr. Orchester's card."

"I thank you," Mary Ellen's face was illumined, "though, by what you say, that is not necessary; for if ever I should need him, these same gifts of choice and spiritual insight will lead me to him or him to me."

"Such gifts come only through the understanding of what reality means. The majority have to depend upon apparent means, or so it seems to them. Carles puts it this way: Wherever his card, or anything connected with him, goes, his individuality has established a connection; so he says it is not the card in any case, it is the expansion of his environment, constantly, in its extending circumference, coming rhythmically

into harmony with the expanding environments of others. A beautiful idea, is it not?"

"Beautiful!" said Mary Ellen. "Somehow it makes surroundings so very unimportant after all, if we can reach out from within and seize the essence. I suppose that is what we are here to learn."

Mary Ellen took the early morning boat out of Boston and reached the Thurstons just as they were going down stairs to breakfast.

"I must say, Mary Ellen, it was most inconsiderate of you to be sick just as my house is to be full of company," was Mrs. Thurston's greeting. "I've been in such a nervous state since you left, to know what I was going to do. Now you are here, do hurry and straighten things up a little; then, before you pack, for I suppose that is what you came for, go back to town and see if you can get me anyone from the employment bureau to take your place,—if you are still determined to leave us and go on to the stage. Aldine will have to let you go out during the lesson time."

"Are you feeling quite well again, Mary Ellen?" said Aldine shyly. She was always shy when she spoke to the servants at all as if they *were human*, especially before her mother.

"I feel very well, I thank you, Miss Aldine," returned Mary Ellen.

"Oh, and Mary Ellen, we will have to do without your services at table, for I have promised to send Guy some things and need something to pack them in. There are several soap boxes out in the barn. I wish you would get one, brush it up, and pack the articles that are lying on his bed. There's fishing tackle, and heaven knows what! Look out you don't get any fish hooks into your fingers."

"Mother!" said Aldine in an aside, "do send her into the kitchen first for some breakfast. She looks thoroughly exhausted."

"Oh yes, of course,—I forgot. Go and get some breakfast, Mary Ellen; and I am sorry you have been sick. Oh dear, I suppose I might have said that when she first came in; but one forgets to be decent with all the pressure that is put upon us now-a-days. Come to the beach to rest indeed! With this ark of a place and grounds, it's worse slavery than the city house where things are more compact. I begin to think the civilization of to-day is turning us into devils."

"I suppose, as Mary Ellen is so fond of saying, we *choose* these things, so we can't blame anybody but ourselves if they turn and rend us."

said Aldine thoughtfully. "I am sorry Mary Ellen is going. I believe she was beginning to make me more human."

Mary Ellen went into the kitchen and swallowed a cup of coffee; then taking a couple of muffins in her hand, she went out to the barn. A part of the harness room was set aside for the preservation of useable packing boxes. As she opened the door, she started back; for there, grim and sinister, stood Mr. Thurston.

"You needn't pretend that you don't want to see me after coming back here to hunt me up," he began.

"Mr. Thurston," replied Mary Ellen, "I promised your wife not to leave her in the lurch; and had I not done so, I have too much regard for her as a good mistress, and for my own character, to vanish in air leaving her in ignorance as to my fate. If she has any heart she might have wasted much sympathy over my sick plight and uncertain end. Certainly, had she cared sufficiently to trace me, disaster would have overwhelmed your home. I do not wish to bring wreckage upon your family. I am fond of them all."

"Afraid of discovery, eh!" sneered Mr. *Thurston*.

"I afraid? Of what? I fear nothing. It is you who should be afraid!"

She turned deliberately, passing behind Mr. Thurston, to leave the room. A second after she had moved beyond his range of vision, there sounded a report, and he fell to the floor, shot from some unknown source.

He had been hunting that morning, and Mary Ellen, turning in the direction of the sound, saw his gun hanging on the wall directly in line with him, though the hand that had pressed the trigger, was nowhere to be seen.

Quickly she loosed the belt from her waist, and while calling for help with all the strength of her strong young lungs, drew it tight above the knee until the lips of the wound turned back, thus materially checking the flow of blood.

"By heaven, Mary Ellen," he gasped as she bent over him. "This is a devilish revenge you have taken on me for my pleasantries."

Mary Ellen did not reply.

They did not move him until the doctor came. Just before they lifted him to take him to the house he whispered to Mary Ellen.

"Can we make a pact?"

"No," said Mary Ellen, "now and forever, no!"

"Take this girl into custody," said Mr. Thurston, turning to the doctor. "It was she who shot me."

CHAPTER XII

THERE was no use in denial; no one else could possibly have done it. The gun hung on the wall as Mr. Thurston had left it, but with one barrel empty. Who could have taken it down and replaced it but Mary Ellen? Besides, Mr. Thurston swore to the truth of his statement, and he was "an honorable man." The motive? That was because Mr. Thurston had missed harnesses and feed, and in trying to trace the thief had asked Mary Ellen questions which she had chosen to consider aspersions on her honesty. She had been unreasonably enraged at his very natural questionings, had caught up the gun, perhaps not really intending to kill, but it had gone off in her hands and he was to have a stiff leg for life, perhaps, to pay for her temper. As to the theft, he had no reason to think she had anything to do with it and had never thought she did have. He was only trying to find out from leading questions if she had any suspicions as to the culprit.

That was practically all there was to the trial; but the verdict sent Mary Ellen to the penitentiary for five years.

CHAPTER XIII

TO find the quarry whence to hew the building blocks for my character,' " said Mary Ellen grimly, as she was driven up to the great building set in the midst of green and restfulness, in one of the sweetest spots in Massachusetts. "I said that to Mme. Pinchot and she told me I might be grimed in the quarrying. Yet, you *chose* it! Remember, Mary Ellen, you *chose* it! *Now choose to hew well!*"

They went through the preliminaries of her entrance, and she was shown her home for the next five years!

"My environment supervises it all," said Mary Ellen; and she smiled.

They had let her bring her few books with her, and these after being carefully inspected, went with her into her little cell. Aldine never bought for herself such books as these she gave Mary Ellen, though she had many friends among those flitting about the edge of better things who were continually sending them to her, hoping to interest her; but she did not know how to use *them*, and passed on to Mary Ellen those she *could dispose of* without detection of the givers.

"Use them, Marie Alano," she said to her once; "perhaps a little of your wisdom will fall on me sometime, and help me when I need it most, because I have given these to you." She laughed half wistfully.

When the moment of elevation which was upon Mary Ellen at her entrance into captivity had passed, the desperation of the situation appalled her. Oh, the spaces, the whiteness, the vacuity of it all! She was taken at once to work in the kitchen, and when she saw the great vats and the loaves of bread, waist high, she was seized with such nervous hysteria that the physician was called. Recognizing the highly sensitized organism with which he had to deal, he wisely did not send her to the infirmary, but back to her own cell; and someone, (she did not know who) sent her some flowers, and moved her little table of books close to her cot; and there she found, one day, the last book Aldine had given her, "The Soul of the Bible," written in familiar language. Opening it listlessly, she was struck with the comradeship of the One who rose in the synagogue and read so simply and tenderly:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he hath anointed me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He hath sent me

To heal the broken hearted,
And to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."

"That is what I will try to do," said Mary Ellen.

But when the principal of the prison herself came to see her, Mary Ellen rose on her couch and held out her arms.

"I am not a number," she cried deliriously, "I am a *soul*. I am Marie Alano, and I have come to quarry building blocks for my character."

The woman stooped down and took the girl in her arms.

"Marie Alano you shall always be to me; and I shall think of you as such," she said, and Mary Ellen sank back, content.

Somewhat austere in appearance, it is true, but an angel in the flesh was this principal of the reformatory,—one of the first to institute humanizing methods out of routine, and to recognize the individual. The women adored her; and when Mary Ellen attended the first service and saw the faces of the girls radiate with joy or bend low with pathetic disappointment as they passed *her*, *acknowledged* or *unacknowledged*, through

the flower she gave or withheld as appreciation of their endeavors through the week, she felt again the elevation with which she had entered the place.

" 'To proclaim release to the captives,'—release from their old ideas and their surroundings. Perhaps I can help,"—and when one girl burst into tears and kissed Miss Lemsons's hand as it passed her the pure white lily as a token that she had done all she had been asked to do, Mary Ellen nearly fainted with ecstasy at the revelation of what her life of helpfulness might be, and of what small things count in bringing great results.

"I *choose* integrity! I *choose* helpfulness!" she said. "Surely I have it here;" and she went cheerfully to her place in the refectory, where good but meagre fare was set forth in tin plates and cups on bare tables, with no knives or forks or napkins. A girl near by was as happy as a child with a spoon gained as reward for good behavior; another had acquired ugly broken ware in place of tin; but farther down the long hall Mary Ellen saw a table set with all the dainty appointments of a well ordered household, the reward of those who had attained.

And so it was throughout the prison life,—working through to salvation and progress, at-

ways. No step forward was unnoted, and steps backward were tenderly dealt with. The girls did not wear stripes, but were clothed in dresses of plaided homespun made by themselves; and as she saw the clumsy mis-matching of the goods and the awkward cut of some of the outfits she believed, if she were given opportunity, that she could find *everywhere* a place to help.

For herself, she determined to go forward. She read her books over and over, and pondered upon them. In her hours of seclusion she meditated carefully over the lessons she had seen at Mme. Pinchot's and expressed her impression as best she could, and every day she grew in grace as the result of her practice. She found that peculiar buoyancy and hopefulness were achieved by the careful utilization of the fingers, not knowing she was following in the footsteps of scientific builders of brain. She took every opportunity to use her fingers co-ordinately with her mind, and with delicate precision.

The glare of the white walls tired her eyes, and she begged a black ribbon with which she covered them while thinking; and to farther exclude the light, she covered that with white. Then, sitting pondering the things she had learned, and *wondering* over the meanings she did not understand,

she evolved through that inner vision, thus unconsciously evoked such breadth of revelation that the prison walls were felled for her by something stronger than axe or pick,—the power of the conscious mind.

As the days went on, and her favors, because of behavior, were more frequent, she became almost free within the precincts of the place, and sometimes was allowed to go across the green grass all alone to pick flowers in Miss Lemson's private garden. Little by little she became part of the lives of hundreds about her, and the name crept from one to another until she was universally called "The little sister of us all." Wherever she was allowed to go, there went she. Women who had remained obdurate with keepers and helpers melted before Marie Alano, and became like little children.

Miss Lemson, the head of the prison, was growing old, though never once did her grasp weaken on affairs or souls. When Marie Alano had become a "trusty," Miss Lemson took her often as her individual maid and talked to her from out her vast experience, and Mary Ellen responded so comprehendingly that sometimes she herself was alarmed at the knowledge, which swept in upon her from she knew not where.

"I feel as if I know things I am sure I have never learned," she said, amazed, one day. "I feel, Miss Lemson, as if the stores of my father's mind were poured into mine, selected and digested;" and behind the windows of her soul her inner vision contemplated and meditated upon the wonders she had found.

Miss Lemson brought her into touch with teachers, among them a German and a French woman of great cultivation, and with a musician of both instrumental and vocal work; and while the latter taught her harmony as mathematically conceived, she revealed to him the inner meaning of that same rhythm and harmony in the universe so far as she had learned it.

"Marie Alano," said Miss Lemson one day when Mary Ellen, with gentle hands, was dressing the principal's hair, "you never committed the crime for which you were sentenced. Of that I feel assured. No girl could leap into the poise that you possess, and no girl with such poise would lift a weapon against another in a fit of passion. Only as a premeditated crime could I believe the thing possible of you, and that I know it was not, both from the testimony and from what I know of your character. Did you do all *you could* to clear yourself, Marie Alano?"

"No, Miss Lemson, I did not," said Mary Ellen.

"Why not?"

"At first I was too stunned. I knew no one to whom to turn. I had been given the card of a wonderful man, a lawyer on whom I might have called to defend me; but when the card was given me, I felt so sure that, should I need him, I should know how to find him without material means, I never even looked at the bit of paste-board, and when they picked up my things and sent them here, it was lost."

"Yes," said Miss Lemson. "Principle works always through manifestation. We must not overlook the smallest messenger in form, however evanescent or insignificant it may seem."

"I know his name, but am glad now I did not know where to find him; for I should have fallen from my pledge of helpfulness. Had he taken the case and cleared me, it would have wrecked many lives, whereas now only mine is assailed."

"Tell me about it, Marie Alano."

"You believe me innocent. Will you regard my reasons for reticence? I do not know who fired the shot, but it was not I."

One day, in the beginning of the fifth year of her sentence, she was crossing the garden when she passed a workman newly engaged upon the

place. He straightened himself as she passed, and watched her out of sight.

"Who is that girl?" he said to a woman weeding a garden near by.

"We have all forgotten her as a number, long ago, but she is known everywhere as 'The little sister of us all,' replied the girl.

In a few moments the man presented himself at Miss Lemson's office and begged an audience.

"Miss Lemson," he said quickly, "on what charge was 'The little sister of us all' sentenced?"

"For shooting a man in a fit of passion. Why?"

"Because she never shot him."

"By what right do you make that assertion?" said Miss Lemson, motioning the man to a chair.

"By the right of my two good eyes. I saw the whole thing. I had been stealing from the Thurs-tons fairly regular, for some time,—chicken feed and so forth, but got bold and stole two fine harnesses. I felt very secure, for I had covered my tracks well. I don't mind telling all about it now, for I have served my time for the steal and they have their harnesses back. That day I had heard that Mr. Thurston was trying some tricks to catch me and I wanted to see by daylight what they were. I was walking up to the barn *quite boldly* under plea of examining a horse he

had advertised for sale, but no one was in sight. I scared a large hen in her nest in a clump of lilacs near the door. She ran into the harness room fluttering and squawking, as the fools will, and I heard her fly up. I looked in and caught sight of Mr. Thurston and this girl you all call 'Little sister of us all.' A gun was hanging on the wall just on a line with the man, and what does the blamed hen do but light on the trigger and off it goes. I heard the girl call for help and put space between me and the shooting as quick as possible. I had no thought anyone would be convicted or I'd have appeared and acknowledged my presence and told about the hen. I was caught myself a little later, and my own troubles made me forget the incident. Who accused her?"

"Mr. Thurston himself," replied Miss Lemson.

"The devil he did. He knew it was a lie. He knew she never had time to reach the gun. Now what did he do that for?"

"Will you stand by your statement?"

"I will," replied the man. "Call on me when you please."

"Marie Alano, you are exonerated," said Miss Lemson as soon as she could summon Mary Ellen to her. "My dear, dear child, I have always believed in you."

"I have always been exonerated," said Mary Ellen simply. "I have never been condemned. Why, I have never been in captivity! I am free."

Miss Lemson was a wonderful woman and she understood.

"What shall we do, Marie Alano? Shall we set forward proceedings for your release?"

"No," said Mary Ellen. "I am not in bondage. I have followed my choice. What more can I desire? Let me stay here till my time is out, then I will take my next step in the worship of God by service to man. What more of life could one want than that, Miss Lemson?"

"But when you go out from here your character should be freed from the unjust accusation. He should be compelled to retract."

"My character is far beyond his touch. How little is this spot compared with the spaces I have seen in my moments of silence and seclusion. Miss Lemson, I feel often that I have been face to face with the hidden things of God, and I have tried to manifest them in the flesh."

"Marie Alano," said Miss Lemson tenderly, "I truly believe you have."

CHAPTER XIV

YET the time was drawing near for her dismissal. The situation must be faced. During the last six months, as was often the case with the prisoners, Mary Ellen went about on probation. A woman of regal bearing and benign presence, not cultured as in common parlance, but learned in things of which she had gained cognizance through the spirit-guided intellect, she had, during the last weeks, spoken before many audiences on the life of the prisoner and the way to approach reforms. Now the time had come for a definite stand in the outside world. What should that stand be?

The morning mail brought a letter from Aldine. A bit of pasteboard dropped out from its folds.

"Dear Marie Alano," (the note began), "I found this little card today in the copy of Sara Crewe. It must be yours, I know; and now that your time of release is near, I hope it may be of use to you. Marie Alano, my heart aches with the horror of this thing our family has imposed on you. No court or jury, no statement of my father's can make me believe you guilty. Your

purity speaks far above the voices and judgment of men. God help me, Marie Alano."

Mary Ellen took the card. It was Carles Orchester's.

The next day she sought the address transcribed upon it.

Its owner knew her when he saw her.

"Mr. Orchester," she said directly, "I want to enter your Brotherhood of Service as a novice. I have so much to learn. Will you admit me?"

Carles Orchester looked through her eyes for one full minute, and as steadily she looked through his. Then he rose and passed into the next room. He returned at once, bringing to her a noble company of men and women.

"Friends," he said, "here is one who seeks to enter upon a novitiate. Instead, behold, already,—a Master!"

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